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Impact of Psychoeducation on Professional Stress Reduction Among Prison Guards

Alma Bravo-Mehmedbasic^{1,2}, Dubravka Salcic^{1,2}, Abdulah Kucukalic^{1,2}, S. Fadilpasic^{1,2}, L. Cakovic¹, Enra Mehmedika-Suljic³, Izet Masic⁴

Association Center for Torture Survivors¹, Department of Psychiatry², Department of Neurology, Clinical center of Sarajevo University³ Department of Family medicine, Medical school of University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina⁴

Original paper

SUMMARY

Introduction: Through psychological support for prison guard's awareness about professional stress and burn-out, cognitive assessment of stress consequences, insight in coping strategies, as well as prevention of stress consequences is achieved. **Aim:** Evaluation of psychoeducation effects on professional stress consequences within prison guards. **Method:** In the research were included 122 prison guards from three prisons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of them have been tested before and after psychoeducation was finished using following instruments: Index of reaction, STAI questionnaire, SAMACA questionnaire. **Results:** Differences between first and second measuring of subjects included in this study in Sarajevo prison indicated statistically significant reduction of stress reactions, improvement of coping strategies and communication skills. In prisons Zenica and Kula there are differences between first and second measurement in stress reactions reduction, improvement of coping strategies and overcoming of stress and improvement of communication skills as well, which are not statistically significant. In Kula prison, significant differences between two measurements in attitudes of prison guards toward detainees were observed. **Conclusions:** Results of this study show that prison guards within prisons where are detained persons with long period of imprisonment are more exposed to professional stress, comparing to prison guards who are employed in investigation prison. Psychoeducation resulted in positive effects and it should be obligatory included in prison guards training with the aim of decreasing of psychological consequences of prolonged professional stress to which they are exposed to. Psychoeducation should be on continuous basis and led by educated mental health professionals.

Key words: professional stress, prison guards, psychoeducation.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to series of scientifically based research work in prisons is marked as a highly stress one and a special risk group is consisted of those who are in direct contact with detainees (working with aggressive and manipulative detainees is a especially stressful). If the work of prison guards is done in a unfavorable circumstances (pre-capacitation, lack of employees, working in shifts, poor security measures for working organization, mutual distrust) then the stressfulness increases progressively (1). Consequences of stress with prison guards are manifested by destabilization

of their physical and mental health, frequent sick leaves, high degree of staff erosion, damaged family life and early retirement (2). At the same time, a very demanding and stressful work in prisons makes a large number of prison guards vulnerable to developing syndrome of professional burn out. Those who approach their work with high ideals, motivation and eagerness are especially prone to developing of this syndrome. Professional burn out is manifested by emotional and physical exhaustion, weakening of initiative, alienation, loss of satisfaction and progressive decrease in working efficiency. The prison guards also lack necessary, organized and continuous psychological support in order to prevent unfavorable reactions to stress and create preconditions for a better psychosocial climate, better interpersonal relations and a better functioning of prisons overall (3, 4).

2. AIM

Evaluation of psychoeducation effects on professional stress consequences within prison guards.

3. METHOD

In the research were included 122 prison guards from three prisons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research included two prisons in Federation of B&H (Sarajevo and Zenica prisons) and one Republica Srpska (Kula prison). The psychiatrists who are educated lecturers, has held a couple of lectures(workshops) to prison guards covering the subjects adjusted to their needs through which they tried to educate them within those areas important for everyday work with detainees in the prison. Educator tried to explain prison guards how to cope with stress in an adaptive way and overcome it, how to develop and utilize better communication skills both in mutual communication and in contact with detainees. All of prison guards (122) have been tested before and after psychoeducation was finished. In prison Sarajevo 38 of them were tested, in prison Zenica 33 were tested, in prison Kula 51 were tested.

In order to gain precise measures of the psychological variables our team members applied following instruments prior to planned educational activities and after education

program in duration of six months for each prison: Reaction index, STAI questionnaire, SAMACA questionnaire.

3.1. Measurement instruments

Reaction indeks

Consisting of 16 questions that include stress reactions to stress circumstances in the working place. Participants were told to choose the most stressful situation in the working place that occurred within the last month. The questionnaire was created to evaluate whether there were negative psychological reaction to a certain stressful situation such as tension, intrusive thoughts, denial, poor concentration, a feeling of guilt, loss of interest for everyday activities, sleeping disorders (insomnia or nightmares), a feeling that something bad might happen, etc. The answer of the participants were statements: Yes, I have experienced that, and no I have not experienced that.

STAI questionnaire

Consisting of 20 questions related to psychological reactions of the participants within the last 50 days, represents how participants felt in the last 50 days. Participant answers to each question with one of the offered statements. Answers are: 0 (not at all), 1. A bit, 2. to a certain extent, 3. a lot.

SAMACA

Created by CTV professionals consisting of 44 questions, which is divided into four parts. Part A is examining a level of exposure to stressful situations. Part B examines stress reactions, Part C examines coping strategies, and Part D examines the attitudes of participants towards detainees. Participant answers to each question with one of the offered statements. Answers are: 1. never, 2. rarely, 3. sometimes, 4. often, 5. almost always.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Prison Sarajevo

It is evident that education program with prison guards contributed to stress reactions reduction, improvement in coping strategies and stress overcoming and enhancement of communication skills within prison guards. Results show statistically significant changes in these mentioned variables. There were no statistically significant differences in attitudes of prison guards towards the detainees, after the education program (Table 1).

Table 1. Wilcoxon test of differences (two dependant variables)

Couple	Value	Level of relevance
Reaction indeks test-retest	3,81	P<0,01**
Stai test-retest	2,22	P<0,05*
Samaca A test-retest	3,27	P<0,01**
Samaca B test-retest	2,11	P<0,05*
Samaca C test-retest	0,00	P>0,05
Samaca D test-retest	3,62	P>0,05

*Relevant on 5%, **Relevant on 1%,

4.2. Prison Zenica

Education program with prison guards contributed to stress reactions reduction, improvement in coping strategies and stress overcoming and enhancement of communication skills within prison guards. However, results do not show statistically significant changes in these mentioned variables.

Table 2. Wilcoxon test of differences (two dependant variables)

Couple	Value	Level of relevance
Reaction indeks test-retest	0,41	P>0,05
Stai test-retest	1,27	P>0,05
Samaca A test-retest	0,36	P>0,05
Samaca B test-retest	0,22	P>0,05
Samaca C test-retest	0,06	P>0,05
Samaca D test-retest	0,24	P>0,05

4.3. Prison Kula

Education program with prison guards contributed to stress reactions reduction, improvement in coping strategies and stress overcoming and enhancement of communication skills within prison guards. Results show statistically significant negative changes in Stai scale i.e. during the second measurement, psychological reactions of participants to stressful situations in the working place are more expressed. On the other hand, we gained statistically significant differences and by that positive changes in attitudes of prison guards towards detainees (Samaca D) (Table 3).

Table 3. Wilcoxon test of differences (two dependant variables)

Couple	Value	Level of relevance
Reaction indeks test-retest	1,23	P>0,05
Stai test-retest	1,96	P<0,05*
Samaca A test-retest	0,42	P>0,05
Samaca B test-retest	0,49	P>0,05
Samaca C test-retest	0,92	P>0,05
Samaca D test-retest	2,32	P<0,05*

*Relevant on 5%

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study comply with the results of the previous studies indicating efficacy of psychoeducation on professional stress reduction within prison guards.

It also complies with the previous studies indicating that the educational activities which are lead in a quality and a responsible way achieve their main goal and that is gaining of necessary skills and knowledge as well as expanding of already adopted ones within those areas important for work of prison guards. By adopting new knowledge and skills already prejudice and stereotypes about detainees are being rejected.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- Results of this study show that prison guards within prisons where are detained persons with long period of imprisonment (Zenica, Kula) are more exposed to professional stress, comparing to prison guards who are employed in investigation prison (Sarajevo).
- Psychoeducation resulted in positive effects and it should be obligatory included in prison guards training with the aim of decreasing of psychological consequences of prolonged professional stress to which they are exposed to. Psychoeducation should be on continuous basis and led by educated mental health professionals.
- Experience we gained through our activities in three prisons in B&H, as well as the results of our research undoubtedly show that the work of prison guards is under estimated, underpaid, and performed in unfavorable and stress conditions.
- At the same time, prison guards also lack necessary, organized and continuous psychological support in order to prevent unfavorable reactions to stress and create preconditions for a better psychosocial climate, better interpersonal relations and a better functioning

of prisons overall.


- Due to all of the above mentioned, we are not surprised with a results gained from our research, that imply the following: within the target group of prison guards, there are already evident negative consequences of stress in the working place as well as symptoms of professional burn out manifested by destabilization of their physical and mental health and social dysfunction.

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Corresponding author: Alma Bravo-Mehmedbasic, MD, PhD. Clinic for Psychiatry of Clinical center of Sarajevo University. Bolnicka 25. Tel. 00n 387 33 297 000.

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Blurred borders between disciplines and transfer of concepts and principles, integration of the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context - transcending the boundaries (Saskoiva 2000) forces public health professionals provide solutions based on advanced interdisciplinarity. Traditional disciplinary, sectoral Public Health approaches are no longer sufficient to resolve complex health and environmental problems and provide different perspectives related to them (Choi, Pak, 2000)

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It seems that such a perspective enriches problem-based and student-centred approach to learning and what is most important students become partners in the creation of knowledge by working across and beyond several disciplines and the ASPHER conference will provide forum for sharing these practices supported by innovative principles.

Contact:

ASPHER Brussels Office
 North West of England House
 Rue du Marteau 21,
 B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

T 00 32 2 229 5391
F 00 32 2 229 5383
E office@aspher.org
W www.aspher.org

Dr Katarzyna Czabanowska, Institute of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Jagiellonian University
Dr Stojgniew Jacek Sitko, ASPHER President